UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2001/108
21 November 2000

ENGLISH
Original: ARABIC/FRENCH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-seventh session
Item 8 of the provisional agenda

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE

Note verbale dated 15 September 2000 from the Permanent Delegation of the League of Arab States to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of the League of Arab States to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations at Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and has the honour to transmit herewith the report on Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories during the period January to July 2000.

The Permanent Mission of the League of Arab States wishes to express its deep concern at the aggravation of the situation of Arab civilians in the territories occupied by Israel, as described in the attached report, and requests the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to consider this report* as an official document and to circulate it to the members of the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-seventh session.

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* Reproduced as received, in Arabic and English only.

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Annex

Summary report on Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territory during the period from January to July 2000

The harsh ongoing Israeli practices against the Palestinian people have highlighted that people's ability to withstand the various forms of Israeli violations and acts of aggression, the most noteworthy of which are reviewed below:

Demolition of houses

The Israeli authorities demolished 20 houses in the city of Jerusalem. In the Mount of Olives district, they also demolished the Shihabi Building, which was constructed 85 years ago. According to Amnesty International, the Israeli authorities have demolished not less than 2,650 Palestinian houses in Jerusalem and the West Bank since 1987 on the pretext that they were built without a licence.

On 5 June 2000, Israeli occupation forces demolished a Palestinian house in the village of Al-Walja to the south of Jerusalem on the pretext that it had been built without a licence. Seven Palestinians were injured while attempting to prevent the Israeli forces from demolishing the house.

Uprooting of trees

Since the beginning of the year 2000, Israeli bulldozers and settlers have uprooted 8,495 vine, almond, pine and olive trees on the Beit Ummar-Hebron road, at the village of Abud (Ramallah) and in the villages of Basuf, Jalut, Deir Ballut and Kafr Qaddum in the western part of the governorate of Nablus. The total area of this agricultural land amounted to hundreds of dunums.

Acts of aggression by settlers

On 22 January 2000, in the town of Hebron, a large number of settlers threw stones at Palestinian vehicles, which were severely damaged as a result.

On 26 February 2000, settlers from Shivot Rahel forced their way into the Mas'aya area where they attempted, by force, to plough Palestinian-owned land.

Acts of aggression by the Israeli army and police

On 10 May 2000, three Palestinians were wounded in Nablus during confrontations with Israeli troops sent to protect settlers celebrating the anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel.

On 9 July 2000, shots were fired at a Palestinian family near the settlement of Kfar Darom on the main road linking Rafah and Gaza, as a result of which the mother was killed and her husband and two children were severely wounded.

Israeli schemes against Jerusalem

Palestinian juristic and human rights studies centres have confirmed that the Israeli authorities are endeavouring to implement a scheme to divide Jerusalem into five areas in order to turn its Palestinian inhabitants into a minority and annex land without annexing its population in such a way as to ensure that the city's Arab population does not exceed 50,000.

The Israeli authorities are also withdrawing the identity cards of the Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem by various methods, such as requiring them to hand in their cards and then refusing to return them, thereby depriving them of their right of residence.

Raids on commercial establishments in the Holy City have continued. Their owners are handed notices warning them that they must pay exorbitant amounts of tax (the "arnona" property tax), failing which their stock is liable to be seized. Palestinian traders have suffered severe financial and economic losses and damage in this way.

Torture and detention of children

In its newsletter entitled "Small Hands", the Palestinian branch of the juristic movement Defence for Children International stated that Palestinian children living under Israeli occupation were being subjected to various forms of torture, ill-treatment and harsh interrogation, which prevented them from thinking and acting as children.

The movement strongly criticized the Israeli authorities for their renewed enforcement of Military Order No. 132 under which soldiers are empowered to detain young persons from

12 to 14 years of age, interrogate them and send them to a military court for an unfair trial in which they can be sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

The American Friends Committee condemned Israel for detaining 16 young Palestinians, in violation of international law, during the last Eid al-Fitr (festival celebrating the end of the month of fasting). It also condemned the military decision to conduct a campaign of arrests among Palestinian children, as a result of which more than 20 schoolchildren from Arroub camp to the north of Hebron were arrested on the pretext that they had thrown stones.

Israeli measures against Palestinian workers

The Israeli human rights organization Betzelem published a report on the degrading treatment and acts of violence to which Palestinian workers were being subjected by Israeli soldiers at the Erez checkpoint, where they were liable to be beaten, detained, humiliated and kept waiting under the burning sun. There were reports of cases in which shots had been fired at vehicles carrying workers, as a result of which some of them had been killed.

The organization indicated that the Israeli Shabak (General Security Service) was using its power to withdraw work permits and identity cards as a means to force workers to cooperate and provide information. The report emphasized that the situation of workers in Israel was one of the fields in which the peace process had not led to any improvement.

Acts of aggression against religious sites

On 30 May 2000, the Israel occupation authorities prevented the Palestinian Board of Islamic Awqaf (Religious Endowments) from continuing the renovation and maintenance work in which it was engaged at a mosque in the Jewish quarter of the occupied city of Jerusalem on the pretext that permits had not been issued.

On 28 June 2000, Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, the Mufti of Jerusalem, criticized the Jewish Agency for showing pro-Zionist films on the walls of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. He emphasized that the projection of such films provoked the feelings of Muslims.

The intifada of prisoners and detainees

On 15 May 2000, Israeli army units opened fire on Palestinian detainees in Megiddo prison during violent confrontations in which dozens of detainees were wounded, some of them seriously.

During these confrontations, which constituted a mini-intifada after the Palestinian detainees had been on hunger strike since 1 May 2000, the detainees threw stones and demanded their release and the improvement of conditions of detention in prisons.

The demonstrations of solidarity with Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons coincided with other demonstrations in the towns of the West Bank and Gaza Strip on the occasion of the fifty-second anniversary of the catastrophe in which the Palestinian people were driven from their homes in 1948.

During the confrontations, which lasted for nine days, seven Palestinians were killed, including a Palestinian policeman who died on 28 June 2000, and more than 1,000 were wounded as a result of the Israeli army's use of live ammunition, rubber bullets and gas grenades.

The BBC announced that the Israeli military forces had used the internationally prohibited dumdum bullets.

In its statistical report on Palestinian detainees in Israel, the Gaza Centre for Rights and Law stated that the highest rate of detentions had been recorded in 1970, when the Israeli occupation authorities detained about 23,000 Palestinians. A high rate had also been recorded in 1980, in which 16,000 Palestinians had been detained. During the first year of the intifada, which began in the latter part of 1987, the number of Palestinians detained in Israel amounted to about 14,000. The report also noted that 115 prisoners and detainees had died in occupation prisons at the hands of the Israeli internal security agency Shabak or as a result of medical neglect.

According to a statistical report published by Solidarity International for Human Rights, the occupation authorities had detained about 850,000 Palestinians since 1967.

The occupation authorities are still holding about 1,650 Palestinian prisoners in spite of the agreements concluded between the Palestinians and the Israelis under which all prisoners and detainees were to be released.

On 19 June 2000, the Israeli Government decided to release only three of the detainees who had been convicted of carrying out attacks in which dozens of Israelis had been injured. The Israeli Government said that this was a token of its "good intentions" towards the Palestinians.

Bilal Ammar, one of those who was released, told the France Presse agency that "he was happy but, at the same time, distressed because all his other fellow detainees were still in prison".

Hisham Abdul Raziq, the Palestinian Minister responsible for the file of the detainees, said that the release of only three detainees was unacceptable. He went on to say: "What we want from Israel is the implementation of the agreements and the release of a larger number of detainees".

Seizure of water resources

Israel is seizing the Palestinian water resources contained in the aquifers of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which are being depleted due to over-pumping to the Israeli settlements. The groundwater salinity has also increased to a dangerous level. Although the international health specifications for drinking water stipulate that its chloride content should be about 250 mg per litre, in the Gaza Strip it amounts to 1,000 mg and the nitrate content per litre, which should be about 50 mg, amounts to 200 mg.